

# NewsMatters

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## Preparing for Power Outages

Power outages are an unfortunate reality and often strike fast and unexpectedly, leaving employees looking for answers. Often a result of extreme winter or other severe weather, a power outage can leave a workplace without the heat or lights on, and the impact can extend to employees' homes—and their personal safety.

Employee relations are critical before, during and after a crisis, and HR professionals and leaders can play a pivotal role in helping to protect employees in this time of need. Unfortunately, power outages can create challenges for communicating with employees at the time when information is most critical, so it's important to prepare accordingly.

This article lists steps that employers can consider to prepare for power outages.

### Create a Response or Crisis Management Team

Responding to a crisis can require all hands on deck. Ideally, responsibilities can be shared by a ready team rather than lying with one person. A response team may be able to respond to power outages, in addition to other crises. This team doesn't need to be comprised purely of leadership, but rather can engage employees of all levels. This team can develop, execute and evaluate an organization's crisis response.

### Establish an Inclement Weather Policy

One of the best ways an employer can prepare for power outages is to create a formal policy. A commonly used policy is an inclement weather policy, which addresses power outages among other weather-related events. When developing policies, employers should include topics such as:

- How determinations will be made for workplace closings
- How and when employees will be notified of a workplace closing
- How employees will alert management if unable to come into the workplace

- How employees will be compensated during a workplace closing
- Whether employees are eligible to use PTO during a closing

These are example topics for creating an inclement weather policy. When creating policies, employers should consult with local legal counsel for legal advice.

### Create a Plan and Communicate With Employees

In the event of a power outage, it's important to have a response ready for use. A plan should address topics such as:

- Identifying a crisis
- Promptly alerting employees
- Taking actions to address business continuity
- Resuming work as the disaster concludes
- Ensuring that employees know when they are expected to return to work

Unfortunately, many employees may lack have access to communication channels such as phone and email if they're impacted by power outages. Employees should be aware of policies and be prepared to respond, but employers should be proactive and communicate as early as possible. Employers shouldn't wait until a crisis to ensure that employees are aware of any policies, plans, expectations and resources that address power outages and other crises.

## Provide Resources to Employees

While many employees may be well-equipped to navigate a power outage, others may lack information and safety best practices. Employees should be aware that personal safety should be their top priority during a power outage. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information on what's important to know when power goes out unexpectedly.

Employers can educate employees on how to respond to a power outage, addressing topics such as:

- Gathering essentials
- Protecting a food supply
- Protecting a water supply
- Protecting essentials such as medications
- Conserving power
- Staying warm during extreme cold weather
- Avoiding hazards such as power lines and carbon monoxide

While the topics listed above address how to respond to a crisis, employers can also educate employees about taking proactive steps to be even more prepared when disaster strikes. These steps include:

- Investing in a home generator
- Using surge protectors
- Creating a family emergency plan
- Preparing an emergency kit

In addition, employers can encourage employees to take care of their health by educating employees about available resources. Consider ensuring employees are aware of resources your organization offers, including mental health support or an employee assistance program (EAP). EAPs can help with mental health or stress counseling, which are important considerations, especially following a disaster.

## Clarify Workplace Expectations

Employers should consider what factors will affect their workplace, and ensure that employees are aware of how a power outage will impact them. Topics to address include:

- **Scheduling** — The impact of a power outage can vary, but employees should be aware of scheduling and attendance expectations, and how they should communicate if unable to safely make it into the workplace. Ideally, employees should be aware of work expectations ahead of the crisis in case they aren't able to be reached.
- **Workplace safety** — As power returns after an outage, workers may be at risk of electrical or traumatic injuries if they are in contact with or in proximity to power lines, electrical components and the moving parts of heavy machinery. The CDC provides resources on worker safety in a power outage, and recommends that employers and employees be aware of risks and take protective steps to prioritize safety.

These topics highlight a few examples of what employees will likely want to know. However, every organization is different, and employers should carefully evaluate and communicate how any changes will impact employees.

## Preparing for and Navigating a Crisis

When preparing to navigate a power outage or other crisis, deliberate and thoughtful steps can help mitigate risks for employees and your organization.

For additional employee relations resources, contact Brady, Chapman, Holland & Associates today.